

# Bonding With Your Baby



## What's Happening

Attachment is a deep, lasting bond that develops between a caregiver and child during the baby's first few years of life. Loving attachment between a baby and caregiver is critical to the growth of a baby's body and mind. The brain's ability to regulate emotions and respond to stress can be damaged if a baby does not have a strong bond with a parent. This can result in lifelong problems. Babies who have this bond and feel loved have a better chance to grow up to be adults who trust others and know how to return affection.

## What You Might Be Seeing

Normal newborns:

- Have brief periods of sleep, crying or fussing, and quiet alertness many times each day
- Often cry for long periods for no apparent reason
- Love to be held and cuddled
- Respond to and imitate facial expressions
- Love soothing voices and will respond with smiles and baby noises
- Grow and develop every day; they learn new skills quickly and can outgrow difficult behaviors in a matter of weeks

## What You Can Do

No one knows your child like you do, so you are in the best position to recognize and fulfill your child's needs. Parents who give lots of loving care and attention to their babies help their babies develop a strong attachment. Affection energizes your child to grow, learn, connect with others, and enjoy life. Here are some ways to promote bonding:

- Respond when your baby cries. Try to understand what he or she is saying to you. You can't "spoil" a newborn with too much attention—babies need and benefit from a parent's loving care even when they seem inconsolable.
- Hold and touch your baby as much as possible. You can keep him close with baby slings, pouches, or backpacks (for older babies).
- Use feeding time to look into your baby's eyes, smile, and talk to your baby.
- Read, sing, and play peek-a-boo. Babies love to hear human voices and will try to imitate your voice and the sounds you make.
- As your baby gets a little older, try simple games and toys. Once your baby can sit up, plan on spending lots of time on the floor with toys, puzzles, and books.

**The best gift you can give your baby is YOU. The love and attention you give your baby now will stay with him or her forever and will help your baby grow into a healthier and happier child and adult.**

*This tip sheet was created with input from experts in national organizations that work to protect children and promote healthy families. To download this tip sheet or for more parenting tips, go to [www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/parenting](http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/parenting) or call 800.394.3366.*



# Dealing With Temper Tantrums

## What's Happening

Two- and three-year-olds have many skills, but controlling their tempers is not one of them. Tantrums are common at this age because toddlers are becoming independent and developing their own wants, needs, and ideas. However, they are not yet able to express their wants and feelings with words. Take comfort in the fact that most children outgrow tantrums by age 4.



## What You Might Be Seeing

Normal toddlers:

- Love to say “no!” “mine!” and “do it myself!”
- Test rules over and over to see how parents will react
- Are not yet ready to share
- Need lots of fun activities, play times, and opportunities to explore the world
- Respond well to a routine for sleeping and eating (a regular schedule)
- Like to imitate grownups and to “help” mom and dad

## What You Can Do

It is often easier to prevent tantrums than to deal with them once they get going. Try these tips:

- Direct your child's attention to something else. (“Wow, look at that fire engine!”)
- Give your child a choice in small matters. (“Do you want to eat peas or carrots?”)
- Stick to a daily routine that balances fun activities with enough rest and healthy food.
- Anticipate when your child will be disappointed. (“We are going to buy groceries for dinner. We won't be buying cookies, but you can help me pick out some fruit for later.”)
- Praise your child when he or she shows self-control and expresses feelings with words.

If you cannot prevent the tantrum, here are some tips for dealing with it:

- Say what you expect from your child and have confidence that your child will behave.
- Remain calm. You are a role model for your child.
- Holding your child during a tantrum may help a younger child feel more secure and calm down more quickly.
- Take your child to a quiet place where he or she can calm down safely. Speak softly or play soft music.
- Some children throw tantrums to seek attention. Try ignoring the tantrum, but pay attention to your child after he or she calms down.
- Resist overreacting to tantrums, and try to keep your sense of humor.

**When your child is having a floor-thumping tantrum, the most important thing you can do is remain calm and wait it out. Do not let your child's behavior cause you to lose control, too.**

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# Setting Rules With Teens

## What's Happening

Teens may look (and think that they are) full grown, but their brains are still growing and their hormones are changing. This can affect:

- **Decision-making**—Teens make mature decisions at times, and childish ones at others.
- **Risk-taking**—Brain immaturity can result in impulsive or risky behavior.
- **Relationships**—Teens move a little further away from family and a little closer to friends.



## What You Might Be Seeing

Normal teens:

- Crave independence
- Question rules and authority
- Test limits
- Can be forgetful
- Have good days and bad days
- Drive you crazy and make you proud

## What You Can Do

As a parent, you want to set rules to keep your teenagers safe and healthy and to teach them to get along in the world. While it may be tempting to keep your teen in line by setting strict rules and harsh consequences, your teen is likely to respond by becoming angry and more defiant.

Tips to keep in mind:

- Involve teenagers in setting the rules. They may be more likely to follow them.
- Talk about the reasons behind the rules and what you expect from them.
- Choose your battles, and try to provide choices in the matters that are less important. For instance, you might let your daughter pick her own hairstyle if she comes home on time.
- Make sure your teens understand the consequences ahead of time. What will happen if they break the rules?
- Set consequences that are related to the behavior, and be consistent in following through. Ask teenagers to help decide what the consequences will be if they break the rules.
- Do not make consequences so harsh that you or your teen can't follow through. Consider taking away privileges, limiting time with friends, or assigning extra chores.
- Allow your teens to gradually earn more freedom.
- Get to know your teen's friends and their parents, and let them know your rules and expectations.

**Cheer your teens on when they follow the rules! And make sure they know you love and accept them, even when they're not perfect.**

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# Finding Help When You Need It

## What's Happening

Being a parent is a 24-hour-a-day job, and sometimes it can feel overwhelming. Extra challenges can add to a parent's stress. For instance:

- Having a new baby
- Having a child with a disability
- Feeling alone, or not having friends or family nearby
- Being a single parent or having a partner who does not support you
- Dealing with money troubles, problems with your job, or housing concerns



## What You Might Be Feeling

When life is stressful, parents sometimes feel:

- Angry—at your spouse, your friends, or even your children
- Lonely—like you are the only person dealing with so many problems
- Depressed—sad and unable to face your problems
- Overwhelmed—you don't know where to begin or you feel like giving up

## What You Can Do

Stay in contact with friends and family who support you and make you feel good about yourself. Other parents can be a good source of support. If you think stress may be affecting the way you treat your children, or if you just want some extra support, try the following:

- **Talk to someone.** Tell a friend, health-care provider, counselor, or a leader in your faith community how you feel. Or, join a support group for parents.
- **Get babysitting help when you need a break.** Some parents trade babysitting with another family, so each parent gets a break.
- **Reach out to other parents.** You may find parents with children the same ages as yours at a local playground, your church, or your child's daycare or school.
- **Call a help line.** Most States have help lines for parents. Childhelp® runs a national 24-hour hotline (1.800.4.A.CHILD) for parents who need help or parenting advice.
- **Talk to your child's school.** Teachers and school counselors often can point you to other places that can help.
- **Take a class for parents.** You can always learn new skills to care for your children. Classes for parents on discipline, school success, or child development can help you build on what you already know about raising a happy, healthy child.

It is normal for parents to feel overwhelmed sometimes, but don't let these feelings affect how you treat your children. Help is just a phone call away! Call a friend, family member, church, or social service agency to talk to someone.

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# Raising Your Grandchildren



## What's Happening

No matter why or how they came to live with you, your grandchildren will benefit from being in your home. When children cannot be with their parents, living with a grandparent may provide:

- Fewer moves from place to place
- The comfort of a familiar language and culture
- A chance to stay with siblings
- More contact with their parents, depending on the situation

## What You Might Be Seeing

Despite these benefits, the children will face some unique challenges:

- They may feel insecure and unsure that you will take care of them.
- They may act out or challenge you.
- They will miss their parents.
- They may be anxious or depressed.
- They may seem young or act too old for their ages.

## What You Can Do

It will take time for your grandchildren to feel safe and secure in their new home with you. You can encourage these good feelings in a number of ways:

- Set up a daily routine of mealtimes, bedtime, and other activities.
- Help your grandchildren feel “at home” by creating a space just for them.
- Talk to your grandchildren, and listen when they talk to you.
- Set up a few rules and explain your expectations. Then, enforce the rules consistently.
- Reward positive behavior. When children make mistakes, focus on teaching rather than punishing.
- Be as involved with their school as you can, and encourage your children to participate in school activities.

This is a big job, and you may need help from your community. Here are some suggestions:

- Help with housing or other bills, clothing, or school supplies may be available specifically for grandparents raising grandchildren in your community.
- Join a support group. Often there are local groups for grandparents raising grandchildren.
- Ask for help and referrals from a church leader, the counselor at your child's school, or a social services agency.
- If necessary, get professional help to address your grandchild's special needs, such as medical care, mental health care, or special education.

**Parenting the second time around brings special challenges and special joys. Do not hesitate to ask for help or seek services in your community for yourself and your grandchildren.**

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